

Recently, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) denied the State of California's request for a waiver of existing law so that California could adopt it's own regulations for the fuel economy (greenhouse gases) of cars and light trucks. Note that California was asking to be exempted from ... Recently, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) denied the State of California's request for a waiver of existing law so that California could adopt it's own regulations for the fuel economy (greenhouse gases) of cars and light trucks. Note that California was asking to be exempted from the federal law which reserves this regulatory control exclusively to the federal government. Last Wednesday amidst a flurry of press conferences predicting the end of the earth, the State of California sued the federal government over this decision and Speaker Pelosi announced that Congressional Hearings will be held to investigate the decision - A decision to not exempt a state from something.

Now, let's forget about whether you do or do not believe that the non- polluting greenhouse gases emitted by cars and trucks should be regulated. That proverbial ship has sailed for the present. Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards exist and they will for the foreseeable future to deal with either dependence of foreign oil or greenhouse gases. The debate here is what those standards will be and who will regulate them.

Just before the EPA issued it's ruling, the President signed a bipartisan compromise bill which increases CAFE standards significantly over the next 12 years. As is often the case in a compromise, no one was particularly thrilled with it as the standards are too low for some and too high for others. But it is the law of the land determined by the duly elected federal representatives of every state and the president.

And this is clearly a federal issue. Global warming is by definition.... global. It is questionable what unilateral impact a single federal government can have not to mention individual state governments. And dependence on foreign oil is also definitionally a trade related issue which should be handled federally and not by states. California likens this whole thing to the regulation of smog emissions, which California has done since the early 1970's. But smog is inherently a local problem to which a local solution may be necessary and effective. The arguments for increased CAFE standards are absolutely not at all local.

There is also the issue of what the California proposal means from the standpoint of accountability. The new federal law was determined by 536 elected officials from every state and will be administered by the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration (NHTSA). The California proposal would supplant that law in this and 14 other states with a new "law"

made by a handful of unelected bureaucrats at the California EPA in Sacramento who would administer their own decision. No one can tell you what the new California fuel economy standards would be because it would all be in the hands of the bureaucrats at the CalEPA. In other words, the cars you would be allowed to buy and manufacturers would be allowed to sell would be completely dictated in Sacramento without any accountability to the electorate.

I understand that some in the state government wish that the new federal law were different. So do I, albeit for different reasons. It was a compromise which they want to undo. They do not think a 40% improvement in fuel economy is enough. Under the new federal law, manufacturers will still be able to build cars and trucks with the room and performance that Americans want, while getting the fuel economy improvements that our society needs. That's why I supported the bill. If the standards are pushed too far, manufacturers will only be allowed to build cars people will not want to buy. That will result in people keeping their old cars. If people just keep their old cars, everybody loses as the economy suffers and the greenhouse gas and oil dependency issues will see no improvement at all. Today's cars will run forever with proper maintenance. As a guy who sold cars for 25 years, I think I understand a little bit about buyer behavior on these sorts of things. Or don't take my word for it, just look at Cuba where American cars from the 50's still dominate because the public's choice was limited for decades to poorly built and underpowered Soviet-made cars.

The State of California has a few issues of it's own (like a \$14 billion deficit) with which to deal. Maybe state officials should spend their time dealing with those things and give the new bipartisan federal CAFE standards a chance to work.